Chinese Anthropology and its Domestication Projects: Dewesternization, *Bentuhua* and Overseas Ethnography

Introduction

In the 1960s, Brazilian scholar Darcy Ribeiro employed the term "*antropologadoros*" (those who were trained as an anthropologist but at the same time remain as part of the *Other* and/or as the object of study) to emphasize a difference between anthropologists in what was called the First and Third Worlds. Ribeiro's term provide an interesting point of departure toward understanding the predicaments of anthropology in peripheral countries and their politics of affiliation. One of the main issues at stake is the invisibility of other anthropologies. Being aware of the predicaments, anthropologists working in non-hegemonic centers have been trying to re-imagine and re-cofigurate the discipline with various experiments such as 'indigenous' anthropology or "non-Western" anthropology (Fahim and Helmer 1980), 'anthropologies of the South' (Krotz 1997, Quinlan 2000), 'peripheral anthropologies' (de Oliveira 1999), or 'world anthropologies' (Restrepo and Escobar 2005, Ribeiro and Escobar 2006). This article is to examine the aspirations and experiments in domesticating anthropology in China by looking at several moments of its development. The objective here is not to retrace the history of the discipline in China in detail, but to identify some initiatives and movements of creating the conditions for the emergence of an epistemological potential, while placing anthropology in China within the broader context of modern division of intellectual labor and power relations.

Domesticating a discipline from the West

At the beginning of the 20th century, earlier conservative opinions that viewing western values as something complementary to Chinese ideas were soon replaced by a rather radical ideology of westernization. It was believed, among Chinese intellectuals of the time, that the modernization of China should be inevitably accompanied by Westernization. Because of its cultural and geographical proximity, Japan became a model for Chinese modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Various western sociological and anthropological works were translated into Chinese via Japanese translation. Generally (if not simplistically) speaking, in the north of China, anthropological research

carried the imprint of British and European theories as well as sociological interpretations of anthropology, while the American vision of anthropology with close relation to historical and archeological research had a stronger influence in the South of China.[1] Following the path of Western anthropology, researches on "primitive" peoples of minorities were conducted by Chinese scholars.[2]. One scholar (Smart 2006) argues that, before 1949 the Chinese "adopted Western approaches wholesale and the discipline was primarily formed based on a Western model".

However, apart from translating canonical works and familiarizing Chinese students with various research paradigms, pre-1949 anthropologists (and, by implication, sociologists and ethnologists as the distinction was blurred) did argue that social sciences needed modification and adaptation before being applied in China. Most of the first generation scholars' concern was the "domestication of the new social sciences by providing them with a Chinese context" (Dirlik 2012: 17). They engaged preliminary discussions and experiments on the question of *zhongguohua* (中国化, make it Chines). Some sociologists argued that a "sinicized" sociology would result from collecting and organizing traditional Chinese societal and historical materials, and combining them with selective Western theories (Sun 1948). From a different perspective, Wu Wenzao, while admitting that "Sociology, in the market of cultural knowledge, is still a sort of imported product [in China]", made insightful remarks on "sinicized sociology" (社会学的中国化, *shehuixue de zhongguohua*). He suggested to start working with "hypothesis" – a theoretical framework established in Western academia--first; then to proceed with field verification in order to generate a new synthesis of theory and reality. With his students, Wu promoted "community studies" (社区研究, *shequ yanjiu*) - field investigation of a relatively small social group or communities – as a part of the "sinicization" project. They applied a functionalist approach to the in-depth individual communities. Not focusing on a single aspect of a society, such as kinship or customs, they studied the communities as a whole since all parts are interrelated organically. Fei Xiaotong's *Peasant life in China* is a good example of this point. It was regarded as 'a landmark in the development of anthropological fieldwork and theory' (Malinowski 1939). Later in Mau-

[1] Pre-1949 anthropology/ethnology in China was divided into two schools. In terms of research, the northern school, based at Yenching University, conduced village-based fieldwork on Han-majority populations, while the southern school, consisted of archaeologists trained in ethnology and sinology based at the Academia Sinica, did research on ethnic minorities in border areas and research on archaeological materials.

[2] For instance: Ling Chunsheng's investigation on the Hezhe minority in North East of China; survey on Miao minority in Hunan conducted by Ling Chunsheng, Rui Yifu and Yong Shiheng; and Lin Yaohua's study on Yi minoriy in Liangshan.

rice Freedman's 1962 Malinowski Lecture, he encouraged social anthropologists to study societies with long and complex histories, believing that the future course of anthropology lies in this type of study.

With the triumph of revolutionary forces in China in 1949, the course of domesticating anthropology and other social sciences continued, but followed a different direction: de-westernization in conjunction with the Communist state's ideological and political agenda. Social sciences were forced to discard their Western bourgeois background and to integrate with socialism. Whereas experiences from Soviet Union, China's only important foreign policy ally, were desired and adopted. Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach to the study of minorities exerted a dominant influence. Books and practices of Soviet ethnology were introduced to China and quickly took over the established Euro-American anthropological theories.

Apart from the structural ramifications of developing a hierarchy of institutes of ethnic minority studies both at national and provincial levels, another key Soviet influence was the actual definition, identification and classification of *Minzu* minorities (a *Minzu* 民族, translated as "nationality" at that time, who should have a common territory, language, economic form, and similar psychological characteristics). Anthropologists and ethnologists were pressed into the giant project of *Minzu shibie* (民族识别, identification and classification of *Minzu* minorities): a series of expeditions wherein scholars, primarily anthropologists, ethnologists and linguists, as well as government officials, set out to determine the ethno-national composition of the so-called "unified multinational country" of China. By means of this project, the state determined the names, numbers and internal composition of China's officially recognized *Minzu* which were therefore vested with assumed equal political, economic and cultural rights.[3]

By 1956, another major survey (少数民族社会历史调查, *shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha*) was launched to investigate the societies and history of ethnic minorities which were regarded as backward, or as "vivid fossils" of social history. Over 1700 researchers and officials participated in the survey and made a comprehensive investigation of minority groups on issues of productivity, relations of pro-

[3] Theoretically the Classification project was guided in accordance to Stalin's definition on *Minzu*, however, in practice traditional ethno-taxonomic knowledges in China were also brought into service, as recalled in the experiences of scholars such as Fei Xiaotong (1997), Lin Yaohua (1984), and Ma Yao (1982).

duction, class structure, religions and customs. Based on a presupposed idea of progress ethnic groups were furthermore identified as temporally different, belonging to particular stage in the universal trajectory of historical progress (the primitive, slave or feudal modes of production). They were expected to "evolve" to more "advanced" stages via the "civilizing mission" of the Han Chinese, and to be homogenized into a united modern state. Ethnic minorities were therefore regarded as the "savage within" or "enemies" of modernity and the state. In a similar spirit, a survey on languages of minorities was also conducted and Latin alphabetic writings were invented for some minorities after Romanization scheme had been applied to Mandarin Chinese (Fu 1959, Sun 1999).

The domestication project went even beyond the discipline and extended to its practitioners: having received a western education made anthropologists and other social scientists the target of suspicion. Political stigmatization replaced academic discussions. Anthropology, along with various other disciplines such as sociology and psychology, came to be regarded as "bourgeois social sciences", which served the cause of imperialism and colonialism, and were therefore proscribed. Some renowned anthropologists were categorized as "rightists" and stripped of academic positions and teaching responsibilities. Afraid of being associated with "bourgeois disciplines", researchers found themselves under the shelter of *Minzu yanjiu* (minority studies) during the Sino-Soviet honeymoon period and later after the split with the Soviet "elder brother" at the beginning of 1960s recast themselves as "primitive society historians".

In his *Sage of Anthropology in China*, Guldin (1994) referred that the post-1949 disciplinary reorganization as a "Maoization" or a form of "sinicization". Indeed, after Mao's appropriation of Marxism, all the social sciences in China including anthropology went through a process of being "domesticated" according to political demands. The debate over the notion and formation of *Minzu* and its translation among historians and ethnologists in the 1960s was a good example.[4] However, similar to the

[4] In 1954, Fan Wenlan, an influential historian stated that Han *minzu* had taken shape when the Qin united China in 221 BCE, by applying Stalin's four common theory. It stirred a series of debates on the definition of *minzu* as well as its historical formation. Some scholars, citing Stalin's claim that *minzu* was only a product of capitalism, concluded that Han *minzu* could only be formed after the Opium War, namely, when capitalism began to spread in China, however whether the minorities were *minzu* became another issue. Some scholars suggested that minorities were not *minzu* but *buzu* (translating from the word 'narodnost' in Russian), a stage between tribe (*buluo*) and nation (*minzu*) in the Marxist linear social trajectory. Unexpectedly, ethnic peoples felt insulted with such a proposition, which forced those scholars to reconsider and modify their argument. The debate, going beyond academic discussions, was orchestrated in accordance to the political environment. In 1962 a conference was organized to examine the use of term in translation of Marx, Engles and

Chinese appropriation of Marxism, ambiguities and incoherence were also built into the disciplinary dewesternization. In opposition to Guldin's idealist opinion, some scholars have proposed using the notion of "internal colonialism" (Gladney 2004) or "Communist Civilising project" (Harrell 1995) to understand the implication of national minority politics and the role of anthropology and ethnology. As Nicholas Tapp (2002: 65) has concluded, the Classification project "looks in retrospect like one of the great colonising missions of the twentieth century, a huge internal 'self-Orientalizing' mission designed to homogenise and reify internal cultural differences in the service of a particular kind of... cultural nationalism".

In brief, post-1949 anthropology (and ethnology) in China, drifting from Wu Wenzao's *zhongguohua* project, was converted into a technique of social control aiming at managing the relations between ethnic minorities and powerful central government. The "dewesternization" project did not produce what Freedman expected for a 'Chinese phase' in anthropology; instead it implicated the discipline into the projects of nation-state building and modernization predominantly based on Western perspectives on development and progress.

Bentuhua **(indigenization) of Anthropology since the 1980s**

The end of the Gang of Four era in the late 1970s marks the start of the halting emancipation of the social sciences in China. After more than twenty years of political turmoil, academic life was progressively returning to normal. Anthropology as a discipline was re-recognized in the 1980s, and many regional traditions of anthropology were re-established. Elder generation anthropologists were brought back into various research units and institutions, and a new generation of researchers stepped into the spotlight. With the increased enrollment policy of Chinese higher education, the number of students (both undergraduates and postgraduates) majoring in anthropology also increased, so did the number of returned foreign-educated scholars. Anthropology's revival was also marked by a concerted effort to translate Western authors into Chinese. Works of anthropology,

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Stalin and scholars finally agreed upon consistently employing the term *minzu* in all cases, to all the minorities, whatever their stage of development. See Fan 1954; Wang Jianmin et al 1998; Ya and Sun 1979.

which were inaccessible in the previous period of de-westernization were translated into the Chinese language.[5]

An important feature of post-1980 anthropology lies in an increasing study on Han Chinese society, combining both historical research and anthropological fieldwork. A series of rural studies or village studies resulted in monographs on a variety of themes (Jing 1996, Wang 1997, Yan 1996, Liu 2000, Zhang 2003, Zhao 2003). This new feature of anthropological research echoes the rapid rate of rural urbanization and economic development after the introduction of economic reforms in the late 1970s. Another research direction involves revisiting and re-examining previous fieldwork sites, and providing new theoretical insights to the disciplinary development by keeping a historical continuity. On the other hand, the tradition of studying ethnic minorities and producing descriptive studies of their rituals, social organizations and religions has continued under the disciplinary rubric of ethnology. Somehow, a simplistic distinction between ethnology and anthropology seems established in China and the dual roles of anthropologists and ethnologists become distinct: classic ethnology is focused on the "internal Other", while anthropologists focus primarily on various aspects of Han Chinese studies. However, the picture is more complex: within the world of minority studies, an interest in anthropology also exists as some scholars may wear two hats and deal with both anthropology and ethnology. Influenced by Western anthropology from a perspective of Barth, Anderson, and Gellner, and by post-colonial theories, particularly Said's Orientalism, they are not comfortable with conventional Soviet historical evolutionary perspective. For them, interest in anthropology doesn't simply result from a doubt of the continued relevance of a search for untouched and radically different cultures. It is a strategy to gain access to study Han society, and it also implies a willingness to negotiate with the authorities on the established categories of academic discourse and to develop a critical anthropology independent of state ideology and intervention. In this sense, the differences between the old guard of ethnology and western influenced anthropology is something more than the academic division of labour, it can be related to a different vision on the nature of the discipline as a whole. Therefore the revitalization of anthropology in post-1980 is not only a re-recognition and reorganization of the discipline, but also a discursive intellectual orientation.

[5] For the development of anthropology in China after the 1980s, see Hu Hongbao 2006.

At the center of the intellectual orientation was the discussion of *bentuhua (本土化, indigenization, or nativazition* as used by Chinese anthropologists*)*. It is an old question pronounced from a different perspective: if *Zhongguohua* (making the social sciences Chinese) implies a perspective burdened with culturalist readings shaped by the legacies of imperial Chinese historiography, *bentuhua* (make the discipline local) reveals a resurgence of local consciousness with a different sense of the local which is "still juxtaposed to the national, but it is increasingly a product not just of localized parochialism, a retreat from the national, but of interactions between the global and the local that cut across the boundaries of the nation, projecting the local into transnational spaces" (Dirlik 2003, 19). Though sometimes "*bentuhua*" would also be pronounced with strong political implication along with the "development of sociological theories and methods with Chinese characteristics" which places it within a socialist political program defined by Deng Xiaoping, the shift from *Zhongguohua* to *bentuhua* did show the willingness and efforts of anthropologists to escape from political engagement.

In the 1990s, *bentuhua* appeared as a prominent keyword standing out in the development of anthropology in China.[6] In 1999, an international conference "Indigenization of anthropology in China" was organized in Guangxi followed by publication of the conference proceedings. It's agreed among the scholars that *bentuhua* is an inevitable path for social scientists in non-Western regions due to the inability of Euro-American social sciences to constitute a relevant and liberating discourse in the context of local societies. However, how to materialize *bentuhua* remains unsettled: some (Huang 2001) see it as learning from the West by applying selectively western theories and methodologies on Chinese soil, while some (Zhang, 2001) insist that *bentuhua* is about developing applied anthropological research by placing the discipline "in the service of ordinary people and of social development" and the discipline should "contribute to social, economic, and even political development by providing knowledge and views grounded in reality", becoming part of the political decision-making process. Some (Bilik 2001) just emphasizes that the issue of *bentuhua* should be understood as part of the modernization process in China, without further clarifying necessary approaches. In a way,

[6] The discussion was inspired by similar discussions in Taiwan, starting from late 1970s, *zhongguohua* (sinicization) featured as an important issue among Taiwan anthropologists and sociologists. The conference "Sinicization of social and behavioral sciences" held in 1980 to advance the discussions and the papers were published and grouped from three perspectives: theoretical framework, methodology and empirical research. See Yang and Wen 1982. A follow-up conference which also included scholars from Mainland China was held in 1983. However, starting from 1990s, discussions and research on sinicization inclined more toward *Taiwanhua* (Taiwanization) in order to adjust to changes in the larger environment. See Chang 2005.

most of the discussions still focus on arguing about the necessity of *bentuhua* instead of how to achieve it. On the one hand, Chinese anthropologists agree that objective of *bentuhua* is to generate ideas, concepts and debates which should be informed by hermeneutics between their own and other cultures and their anthropologies, in order to create a more relevant, autonomous and progressive anthropology. But their research focuses exclusively on Chinese society (both Han and non-Han), and they are also lack the ambition to take on questions of a more general rather than a China-specific nature. This *bentuhua* movement developed a kind of "local" anthropology in its narrow sense by studying the issue of Chinese anthropology in their "continued insularity of a self-contained ethnographic field" (Pieke 2009): in this way old ideas are merely recycled and new ones are still imported from an external (usually Western) source, while Chinese anthropological works merely provide particularist empirical data and support. The discussion of *bentuhua* is necessary but far from sufficient, and the reflection needs to be moved further and especially beyond a mimetic position.

"Overseas Ethnography": a new approach

Since the end of the 1990s, a new research trend has been developing in China, which promotes *haiwai minzuzhi* (海外民族志, overseas ethnography). The term "overseas ethnography" already reveals the dilemma of anthropology in China: overseas implies the notion of "going out" but anthropology as the study of other cultures should have already involved "going out" in the first place. While looking at the history of anthropology in China, some earlier endeavours on "overseas ethnography" can actually be found in Wu Zelin's (1930) dissertation on examination of racial "attitudes" in America; Li Anzhai's (1937) study of the Zuni; Francis Hsu's (1963) comparative study of Indian, American, and Chinese cultures, as well as Fei Xiaotong's (1948) travelogues of America, however, predominantly Chinese anthropological research has always been conducted "at home", either on the internal Other – ethnic minority groups or Han society. Therefore, overseas ethnography is regarded as a crucial element that has always been missing from Chinese anthropology, a dimension that Chinese anthropologists have never reached. In November 2009, a forum on "Overseas Studies in China" was organized in Guangzhou. At this forum scholars expressed strong interests in developing and promoting overseas ethnography, defined as "a research and narrative method situating in the Chinese context and employing Chinese as its academic language" (Wang

2011). It involves ethnographic description of people, things and objects primarily exist outside of China. Anthropologists view the promotion of overseas anthropology as a way to contest for knowledge production and control: it is regarded as a way to construct one's own narrative of the world and, by doing so, one's role is shifted from the "object of study" to the "studying subject" (Gao 2010).

Along with academic discussions, some universities such as Peking university, Xiamen university and Zhongshan university established Ph.D. or post-Doctoral programmes on overseas ethnography studies. In 2011, the "Institute of Global Ethnology and Anthropology (IGEA)" was inaugurated at Minzu University in China, co-founded by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and Minzu University.[7] One of its objectives is to promote overseas ethnography research, "to meet the need of China's economic rise, changing of development mode, prosperity of national culture, construction of political civilization and academic innovation."[8] Apart from organizing a series of "overseas ethnographic studies workshops", IGEA launched an annual funding scheme in 2012 to offer financial support for overseas fieldwork of Master and PhD students from across the country. An Overseas ethnography book series has been published since 2009. These descriptive ethnographies cover various aspects, such as social organizations, daily life, politics and the religions of the societies in which the authors lived and studied such as United States, Thailand, France, India and Malaysia.

Take some representatives works from the book series for example, Gong Haoqun's *Believers and Citizens* (2009) focuses on the relationship across religion, public life and citizenship in modern Thailand. She examines how citizenship, defined as an abstract unity of right and obligation, has been represented and established on three levels: institution, identity and practice in a Thai village. Li Rongrong (2012), through her fieldword in a small town in California, discusses ordinary Americans' experiences, embodiment and interpretations as individuals and explores the dynamics between individualism and society in the USA. Xiang Biao's prize winning work *Global "Body Shopping* (2007), translated into Chinese, has also been included in this collection. His multi-sited ethnography revealed, in great detail, a configuration of the India-based, global labor management system in the IT industry known as "body shopping," focusing specifically on its operations through Hydera-

[7] This is partly due to the special status of Minzu University which is directly under the administration of the SEAC.
[8] See http://igea.muc.edu.cn/en/lan_ztlist.asp?ztid=14

bad, India, and in Sydney. This collection of works not only breaks with a pattern of Chinese anthropology studying primarily only China, they also bring different insights from Western observers: for example Xiao Biao recognizes how being Chinese and male provides certain kinds of access that being white and female would forbid. Li Rongrong also introduces a comparative aspect by looking at the concept of "individual" (*geren*, 个人) in contemporary Chinese society.

The central idea of "overseas ethnography" lies in the concept of altering the balance of power relations by adopting overseas societies and particularly Western societies as the study object. If ethnography can be regarded as the collective narrative and discourse on certain groups and communities, it also implies a certain power over the study object: the power of analysis, of definition, of categorization. Scholars suggest that by engaging in this new form of ethnography, China will no longer passively undergo the Western gaze and the *zhongguo huayu* (中国话语, Chinese discourse or discourse of China) (Xu. J 2009, Xu. X et al. 2008) should and will find its voice. It implies not only "a shift of studying object", but also "redefine the mental state of the research subject" and reflects the academic ambition of Chinese scholars in what has been called "China's century" (Gao 2010). In other words, Chinese anthropologists suggest that the agency of overseas ethnography should be understood in terms of a resistance again hegemonic anthropological dynamics. If anthropology from the West is seen as "a primary, active 'gaze' subjugating the natives as passive 'object'", borrowing from Rey Chow (Chow 1993: 51), then the returning of gaze from overseas ethnography would be seen as "simulated gaze", and:

This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer 'conscious' of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth 'reflected' in the native-object.

In this sense, the returning gaze should be understood as a constructive move instead of being merely a reflective resistance or even a threat. It might be still early to predict or to evaluate the impact of these new initiatives which are still in the process of taking shape; however, it has to be acknowledged that they are meaningful in altering the "where" of the discipline and its knowledge production: Chinese anthropologists are not merely passive "native informants" confined to study their own culture and providing information for theoretical analysis. However, after engaging with the issue of "*where*", the question of "*how*" remains essential. Or if doing overseas ethnography means Chinese anthropologists finally have a voice in participating the construction of the view of the world, next question to ask is in what or whose "language"? The greatest challenge lies in de-

veloping paradigms and interpretative frameworks, rather than simply reproducing ethnological works by replicating the templates of metropolitan schools.

If most of the discussions among overseas ethnography scholars still focus on the urgent nature and the disciplinary importance of this trend, there is comparatively less discussion devoted to the questions of methodologies. Two perspectives proposed by Professor Wang Mingming are worth noting. Professor Wang suggested a China-centered worldview, derived from an ancient cosmology as an alternative to the Euro-American version of anthropology. To summarize and to forecast anthropological studies in China, he has developed the concept of the "Three Rings" (Wang 2006): the inner ring concerns local studies of the Han Chinese society; the second focuses on the research of non-Han peoples in China; and the third refers to studies done by Chinese outside of China. The theory of "Three Rings" might remind us of the ancient Chinese cosmology which places China as an inner "civilizational" core, and different degrees of "barbarians" at different layers of the peripheries, however, it works in a rather different manner by focusing primarily on the relations and interactions of humans and things in their spatial and temporal dimensions, and on the fluid nature of boundaries between multiple centers and peripheries. Avoiding adopting conceptual tools such as "civilization", "nation", "culture" and "state" etc., professor Wang hopes to construct a view of a world system which puts China at the center but at the same time de-essentialisesChina as an unproblematic national or civilizational existence.

Another inspiring perspective is to explore the historical potentials of Chinese knowledge. There has been a long history and tradition of writing descriptive narratives of other cultures and people in China. These writings could be regarded as a sort of prototype ethnography. These writings, having existed long before the "anthropological enlightenment" brought by Western scholars, contained mythological, cosmological, geographical and historical aspects, and could be seen as sources for future anthropological theorizing. Therefore, apart from extending new geographical sites, rediscovering, re-reading and re-examining of ancient writings of early Chinese travelers and diplomats to other Asian even European regions could become another inspiring line of exploration. The approach is to explore potentials of alternative normative and theoretical thought enshrined in knowledge tradition and even life practices in China. The category of analysis in these classic writings dismisses the guiding concepts such as "society" and "culture", it involves holistic narratives of a cosmos (or a world system) manifested in a multi-level and multi-boundary power differential relations. A re-reading of these texts not only calls into question the concept of universality, it

also opens a space of visibility and enunciability for other forms of knowledge and epistemologies which are different from the subject-object anthropocentric world-view.

Reflections and Conclusion

With its relocation to a Chinese context, anthropology is inevitably accompanied by a process of domestication and indigenization. The recent overseas ethnography represents an interesting variant on the 'anthropologies of the South' and could be served as an interesting point of exploration to "de-colonise" the discipline and to transform the modern intellectual division of labour, not only because China's economic ascendency places it in a unique position, but also because of its rich knowledge potentials to contribute to a pluriverse of knowledge practices. However the question of "how" needs to be further explored, and methodologies need to be defined and refined. Returning to China's traditions may have the potential for alternative narratives, however, as China itself becomes part of a global structure of power and anthropology has been very close to the nationalist project of the State, scholars should be cautious about the trap of developing a sino-centric new hegemony.[9] In this regard, valuable lessons could be borrowed from the development of recent historical research. Chinese historian Ge Zhaoguang (2010) proposes the research scheme "understanding China from the perspectives of its neighbours and peripheral regions" (从周边看中国, *cong zhoubian kan zhongguo*) to avoid the inadequacies of a unitary approach. He urges us to overcome the Sinocentric model/concept of *tianxia* (天下, all-under-heaven) – traditional vision of world order which presents the relationship of China to the rest of the world is that of the superior polity to the subordinate ones – and to conduct a more comprehensive and systematic study of China through the eyes of its neighbouring countries and regions, especially in the field of intellectual history.

Therefore, transdisciplinary research would be one direction to follow in this quest, as anthropologists are not the only ones who have this agenda for a more balanced academic production system. For instance, in the field of literature, David Wang Der-Wei (2015) proposes to rethink the critical

[9] In a similar fashion, Taiwan historian and politician (Minister of Education from 2000 to 2008) Tu Cheng-sheng (1997) introduced his "concentric circle" (tongxintuan) theory compiling "getting to know Taiwan". Tu interpreted this theory as "having its base on Taiwan, concerning China, and having a foot in the international arena" (*lizu Taiwan, guanhuai Zhongguo, jinru shijie*). This perspective claims to emphasize Taiwanese subjectivity, positioning it at the centre in order to understand its surrounding world, but it has been severely criticized by fellow historians as an approach to serve a political agenda.

paradigm of modern (Chinese) literature in terms of "literary thought" (*wenlun*, 文□). As opposed to "literary theory" which derives its intellectual exercise and rhetorical protocol from Western discourse and tries to generalize literature phenomena always in an ahistorical manner, (Chinese) "literary thought" tries to "explain the role literature plays in a civilization and to describe literature and literary works in terms that have resonance in other areas of intellectual and social life. It aims to bring the very factor of historical contingency into consideration and highlights the generic hybridity in the practice of literature.

Furthermore, another aspect should also be taken into account to re-conceptualize anthropological research in China. For too long, the West remains the benchmark for Chinese evaluation of China's development and Chinese intellectuals continue to refer to Western modernity as the only path of China's modernization and progress. This is partly due to China's "semi-colonial" history. Western colonial control in China did not fully rely on a sustained military occupation and this experience of incomplete colonization has had profound effects on the way that modernity was understood in 20th-century China. As a result, Chinese nationalist elites were much more willing (or eager) to accept Western modernity without questioning it. When anthropologists and other social scientists talk about comparison, they almost invariably refer to the West, however ignoring the fact that the outside world is much larger than their favourite other. In this regard, concerns and experiments for "other anthropologies" mesh with the post-colonial critique. Reflections on the geopolitics of knowledge and transdisciplinary collaboration with post-colonial scholars would only benefit the initiatives of Chinese anthropologists. For instance strategies proposed in works like *Asia as Method* might be rather inspirational (Chen 2010: 223):

> Rather than being constantly anxious about the question of the West, we can actively acknowledge it as a part of the formation of our subjectivity. In the form of fragmented pieces, the West has entered our history and become part of it, but never in a totalizing manner. The task for Asia as Method is to multiply frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward.

Thus, Chinese anthropologists should look beyond the binary of the West and the Rest and look towards other regions such as Asia, Africa and South America, so as to discover new categories, new methodologies and practices by inter-referencing and multiplying the frames of reference. Moreover, colonial anthropology is not entirely a thing of the past and not wholly a thing of the West (van Bremen 1996: 40). Apart from incorporating 'subaltern epistemologies', the recovery of non-dualist Western traditions such as phenomenology would be another way to develop alternative styles of

reasoning and argumentation. This direction converges with the recent "world anthropologies" project/network, which invites anthropologists turning to each other with an attentive eye to epistemic, epistemological and political differences and explores the possibility of establishing new conditions and terms of engagement among anthropologies on a global level[10]. It calls for collaborative efforts of anthropologists both from the peripheries and the centre, as the problem is neither a Chinese or Asian one, nor a problem of the South, but rather the relationship of the social sciences to political power more generally and globally. If such a project were ever to be entertained seriously, anthropology could be the avant-garde of the transformation of the modern intellectual division of labor.

[10] For more information, see their website: http://www.ram-wan.net/index.html

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